

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0520**

June 18, 2019

The Honorable Charles P. Rettig  
Commissioner  
Internal Revenue Service  
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig:

Recent reports showed that TurboTax, Intuit's tax preparation and filing software, pushed taxpayers eligible for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Free File program into paid services<sup>1</sup> and hid their Free File landing pages from search engines.<sup>2</sup> I was troubled further to learn that these tactics are having an especially harmful effect on our United States military servicemembers. I hope you can look into this matter in order to alleviate any unnecessary burden imposed on those serving our nation.

An article published by ProPublica and the Military Times found that TurboTax advertises discounts to members of the military, steering them towards paid products when they are eligible to file for free.<sup>3</sup> ProPublica found that these servicemembers are not re-directed towards Free File, even after the software has enough financial information to determine they are eligible.

Servicemembers often have more complicated tax filings than average taxpayers and are deservedly eligible for greater access to Free File and other programs. Third-party tax filing software participating in Free File, especially companies specifically targeting servicemembers as customers and publicly advertising military discounts, should not be directing eligible servicemembers towards paid products or upselling them on unnecessary ancillary features they would otherwise receive for free.

As the IRS reviews the Free File program, I ask the review to examine military servicemembers' challenges in accessing free filing options, and the extent to which "military discount" marketing leads servicemembers to overpay for tax preparation and filing. I also ask that the IRS report how the agency is increasing awareness of truly free filing options for servicemembers, including Free File, in-person help on military bases, and the Department of Defense MilTax program.

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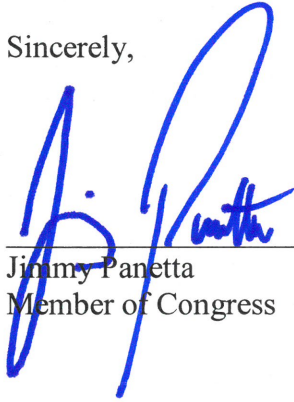
<sup>1</sup> Elliott, Justin, and Lucas Waldron. "Here's How TurboTax Just Tricked You Into Paying to File Your Taxes." ProPublica, 9 May 2019, [www.propublica.org/article/turbotax-just-tricked-you-into-paying-to-file-your-taxes](http://www.propublica.org/article/turbotax-just-tricked-you-into-paying-to-file-your-taxes).

<sup>2</sup> Elliott, Justin. "TurboTax Deliberately Hid Its Free File Page From Search Engines." ProPublica, 9 May 2019, [www.propublica.org/article/turbotax-deliberately-hides-its-free-file-page-from-search-engines](http://www.propublica.org/article/turbotax-deliberately-hides-its-free-file-page-from-search-engines).

<sup>3</sup> Elliott, Justin, and Kengo Tsutsumi. "TurboTax Uses A 'Military Discount' to Trick Troops Into Paying to File Their Taxes." ProPublica, 24 May 2019, [www.propublica.org/article/turbotax-military-discount-trick-troops-paying-to-file-taxes](http://www.propublica.org/article/turbotax-military-discount-trick-troops-paying-to-file-taxes).

The men and women of our Armed Forces have made great sacrifices for our country, and our government rightly has created programs such as Free File and MilTax that benefit them. We must now work to make sure our servicemembers are better aware of these programs and are better able to access them, and not deceived by companies that partner with the IRS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Panetta", is written over a horizontal line.

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James N. Stewart  
Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Defense  
Personnel and Readiness  
4000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-4000